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A POTENTIAL SOURCE FOR THE LATIN PREFACE IN P.OXY. XVIII 2194

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P.Oxy. XVIII 2194

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[. . . . .]os et probatos et imperato-  
rum et senatorum et maximo disserto et pau-  
peros unamortis condidit deus lues autem

5 commortis fieri.<sup>1</sup>

Identifying the putative source behind the Latin preface of P.Oxy. XVIII 2194 has proven to be a very elusive endeavor.<sup>2</sup> The editor of the text, who was rather certain that the preface represented some form of a quotation, believed that a biblical or even some extra-biblical allusion likely lay behind it since the author was a Christian and within the body of the letter the author quotes from Sirach.<sup>3</sup> However, he was at somewhat of a loss to find a suitable match since there was no passage that readily lent itself. Nevertheless, by means of a conjectural emendation whereby he argued that *unamortis* ought instead to be read as *immort(al)es* he reasoned that perhaps a vague allusion could be found to Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24,<sup>4</sup> although he also noted that this could only apply to a relatively small portion of the passage (ll. 4–5) as other words in the preface could not be found anywhere in the Bible.<sup>5</sup>

In two subsequent treatments of this passage, one by J. O’Callaghan and the other by P. Cugusi, little source critical headway was made as both tended to simply follow the suggestion made by the editor of P.Oxy. 2194 that Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24 likely served as the principal scriptural locus of the preface.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Peter van Minnen has posited a different source.<sup>7</sup> He proposed that instead of reading *unamortis* as *immort(al)es* it is much simpler to take it as the equivalent for *unius mortis* (“one death”). He therefore argued that the alleged reference to Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–24 does not work very well but proposed instead that the preface was tapping into common thought in classical literature that espoused the belief that all persons, regardless of rank, status, or wealth, were subject to one indiscriminant death (*unius mortis*).<sup>8</sup>

Due in part to van Minnen’s suggestions, a parallel that takes account of most of the elements in the Latin preface to P.Oxy. 2194 can now be found. In the *Acta Apollonii*, a Christian martyr account that

<sup>1</sup> The Latin text reproduced here is taken directly from the partially corrected text given in P. Cugusi (ed.), *Corpus Epistularum Latinarum, papyris tabulis ostracis servatarum* (= C.Epist.Lat.) I (Florence 1992), 261 (= no. 244). The letter, which is written in Greek, immediately follows the preface and begins on the second half of l. 5.

<sup>2</sup> P.Oxy. 2194 dates to either the late fourth/early fifth century and belongs to a small dossier that includes two other letters: P.Oxy. XVIII 2193 and P.Köln IV 200. On the dating of these letters and the potential identity of the author of these letters see L. Blumell, *Reconsidering the Dates of Three Christian Letters: P.Oxy. XVIII 2193, 2194, P.Köln IV 200 and a Reference in the Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, *APF* 54 (2008): 219–22. All three letters in this dossier contain a rather unusual Latin valediction: *serbo dei tempore*. On the possible meaning of the valediction see P. J. Sijpesteijn, *Apphus and Pascentius: servi dei tempore*, *APF* 40 (1994): 69–70; cf. J. O’Callaghan, *Nota Sobre ‘servus dei’ en los Papiros*, *ZPE* 106 (1995): 201–02.

<sup>3</sup> P.Oxy. XVIII p. 155 n. 2–3 (cf. p. 154 n. 1–3). In the body of the letter in ll. 6–7 the author quotes Sirach 12:2. See note 16.

<sup>4</sup> P.Oxy. XVIII p. 154 n. 1–3. The author actually made this argument with respect to P.Oxy. XVIII 2193.1–3 (*unamortis condidit l deus lues autem comm[o]rtis fieri*), but since P.Oxy. 2194.4–5 repeats this material it was applied to both letters. As a natural part of his change of *unamortis* to *immort(al)es* he was also compelled to change *commortis* to *commort(al)es*; however, as he noted, *commortalis* never occurs in the Vulgate (P.Oxy. XVIII p. 154 n. 1–3).

<sup>5</sup> P.Oxy. XVIII p. 155 n. 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> J. O’Callaghan, *Cartas cristianas griegas del siglo V* (Barcelona 1963), 180 n. 1–3 (“probable allusión a Sab 2,23–24 [Vg]”); C.Epist.Lat. II p. 380 n. 1–3, p. 381 n. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Peter van Minnen, *Notes on Texts from Graeco-Roman Egypt*, *ZPE* 96 (1993): 120.

<sup>8</sup> van Minnen, *Notes* (above, n. 7) 120, who cites Horace *Odes* I 28 as one place that espouses such a view.

allegedly took place sometime c. A.D. 183–85,<sup>9</sup> but is only known through a much later recension of the treatise, a remarkable parallel exists.<sup>10</sup> In the course of Apollonius' hearing before the proconsul of Asia, Perennis,<sup>11</sup> wherein Apollonius is repeatedly threatened to renounce his Christianity or forfeit his life, he makes the following retort:

I want you to know, Perennis, that for emperors and senators and those who wield much power, for rich and poor, for slave and free, for the great and the lowly, for the wise and the simpleton, God has decreed one death for all ...<sup>12</sup>

γινώσκειν δέ σε θέλω, Περέννιε, ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ ἐπὶ συγκλητικούς καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἔχοντας ἔξουσίαν πολλήν καὶ ἐπὶ πλουσίους καὶ πτωχοὺς καὶ ἔλευθέρους καὶ δούλους καὶ μεγάλους καὶ μικροὺς καὶ σοφοὺς καὶ ἰδιώτας ἓνα θάνατον ὥρισεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ πάντων ...

The parallels between Apollonius' statement and certain parts of the preface to P.Oxy. 2194 are so specific and numerous that they can hardly be considered mere coincidence: *imperatorum et senatorum*/ἐπὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ ἐπὶ συγκλητικούς; *et maximo*/καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἔχοντας ἔξουσίαν πολλήν; *et pauperos*/καὶ πτωχοὺς; *unius mortis condidit deus*/ἓνα θάνατον ὥρισεν ὁ θεός.<sup>13</sup>

Notwithstanding the parallels it is still difficult to ascertain for what exact purpose the author of P.Oxy. 2194 was employing this material. In the *Acta Apollonii* the passage is employed by Apollonius to assure his inquisitor that he is not frightened by the prospect of death, since everyone will surely die at some point, but that he rather fears the judgments of God that come after death.<sup>14</sup> In P.Oxy. 2194 the passage has nothing explicitly to do with martyrdom and is seemingly detached from the immediate context of the letter that contains a straightforward request that the addressee lend aid to another individual.<sup>15</sup> However, as the preface will be immediately followed by a citation of Sirach 12:22, which is used within the letter to lend authority to the request and remind the addressee that it is akin to a religious duty to help one in need, perhaps the preface is functioning in a similar fashion.<sup>16</sup> That is, the sender may have inserted the preface to remind the addressee of his mortality as a way of compelling him to render prompt service while he still

<sup>9</sup> C. Erbes, *Das Todesjahr des römischen Märtyrers Apollonius*, ZNW 13 (1912): 269–70; cf. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.21.1–5.

<sup>10</sup> For the *Acta Apollonii* see H. Musurillo (ed. and trans.), *The Acts of the Christians Martyrs: Introduction, Texts, and Translations* (Oxford 1972), xxiii–xxv, 91–105.

<sup>11</sup> In a few important places the details of Apollonius' martyrdom in the *Acta Apollonii* differs from the account given in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 5.21.1–5). Whereas Eusebius places the trial in Rome under the direction of the praetorian prefect Sex. Tigidius Perennis the *Acta Apollonii* places it in Asia where Perennis was supposedly proconsul. On some of the problems of the text and discrepancies between it and the description given by Eusebius see T. D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen 2010), 46–7.

<sup>12</sup> *Acta Apollonii* 25. Translation adapted from Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (above, n. 10), 97.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the many parallels there are some differences, although they are of such a nature that they do not diminish the decisive parallels between these two texts. In the *Acta Apollonii* additional binary categories appear that are not included in P.Oxy. 2194 such as ἔλευθέρους καὶ δούλους and σοφοὺς καὶ ἰδιώτας. Additionally, P.Oxy. 2194 has the added phrase *lues autem commortis fieri* for which there is no good parallel in the *Acta Apollonii*. This last phrase is especially difficult to interpret given the unusual syntax and spellings. While it must surely be taken as an extension of the previous phrase to emphasize that all will die, its exact meaning is elusive. Perhaps it should be read as something like *luem autem cum morte fieri* (“and that in the moment of death they dissolve”). I owe this insightful suggestion to Jürgen Hammerstaedt.

<sup>14</sup> *Acta Apollonii* 25–8. In Apollonius' many exchanges with the proconsul, which are often prolonged and have a markedly philosophical slant, he extolls equanimity and physical detachment in the face of bodily harm, lauds the pursuit of virtue, and on two occasions invokes the figure of Socrates who then serves as an ideal for the Christian martyr (cf. 19, 25–6, 36–8, 41–2; cf. G. Roskam, *The Figure of Socrates in Acta Martyrum*, in J. Leemans [ed.], *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* [BETL 241; Leuven, Paris, Walpole, MA 2010], 242–48). In light of these references perhaps the saying may have originated within the *Acta Apollonii* in some kind of Christian context where the stoic ideals of ἀπάθεια and ἀρετή were promoted.

<sup>15</sup> To be more specific, the author of the letter, a certain Theon, entreats an individual named Pascentius to see to it that no one should trouble a veteran by the name of Paul in regards to a matter having to do with a boat. After this request the letter breaks off.

<sup>16</sup> In II. 6–7 Sirach 12:22 is quoted as follows: εὖ ποίησον φησὶν ἀνδρὶ καὶ ἔξεις τὰ ἀνταπόδομα ἐὰν δ[ε] μὴ παρ' αὐτοῦ παρὰ δὲ τῷ ὑψίστῳ. The only difference between the way the verse is cited in the letter and the way it appears in the LXX is that in the LXX it reads εὖ ποίησον εὐσεβεῖ. The sender of the letter has almost certainly substituted εὐσεβεῖ with ἀνδρὶ

could.<sup>17</sup> If such is the case, and this is only a hypothesis, then in a broad sense the phrase serves similar thematic objectives in both the *Acta Apollonii* and in P.Oxy. 2194 as it serves as a vivid reminder that all life is ephemeral and as such persons should conduct themselves with the hereafter in mind.

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because it fits the context of the present occasion and not necessarily because it represents a known textual variant. See L. H. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (NTTSD 39; Leiden, Boston 2012), 213–14.

<sup>17</sup> Given the nature of the request it seems that the addressee, Pascentius, was a person who wielded some administrative authority and so the references in the preface to various persons who wielded authority, yet were still subject to one indiscriminate death, was appropriate and may have served as a strong reminder to Pascentius to fulfill the request immediately (cf. P.Oxy. XVIII 2193.1–3 where a shortened version of this Latin preamble also prefaces a letter that contains a request from Theon to Pascentius). Nothing else is known about the Pascentius (Πασκέντιος) who appears in these two letters (i.e. P.Oxy. 2193 and 2194); in fact, this is the only time this name is attested in the Papyri. As an aside, the only other known Pascentius at the time was the *comes domus regiae* in Africa who, as an Arian, had used his position to harass catholic bishops (PLRE 2.834–35; cf. Augustine, *Ep.* 238–39, 241; Possidius, *Vit. Aug.* 17).